
Bagging Shopping Waste

County offers reusable shopping bags and baskets

BY MATT PIACENTNI

Tompkins County is known for its progressive government. One thing that keeps the county moving forward is an environmental watchdog branch known as the Environmental Management Council or EMC.

They advise Tompkins' lawmakers on issues that can be of concern ecologically. Newfield has been represented on the EMC by Cindy Schulte, who, as of this week, serves as a Council Person as well.

A recent EMC effort of interest involves the creation and sale of

reusable shopping baskets and bags. To promote environmentally-friendly shopping, the EMC is offering plastic shopping baskets and canvas bags. The governmental group said that they do not profit from the sale. They are sold at cost as a public service.

According to the EMC, their thinking is that plastic grocery bags are convenient, but cause problems such as higher grocery prices to pay for the free bags. They also lead to more petroleum use to produce the plastic for the bags. Of course litter from discarded bags is an ongoing problem as well.

They concede that in theory bags

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not, because they could not find a source. They did say that if anyone knows of a source for recycled plastic baskets, they could let the group know.

Another question they get a lot is, how many bags worth of plastic are in the basket? According to the EMC, a plastic grocery bag weighs approximately six grams, and the plastic part of the basket weighs 660 grams, so there are about 110 bags worth of plastic in one basket.

It sounds like a lot, but they calculate that if you use your basket to

replace two bags per week, you will break even on plastic usage in about a year. So, this is a long term solution to waste in their minds.

Another aspect of the plan they are touting is that baskets and bags will both hold two to four times as much as a regular plastic grocery bag. In addition, they support the groceries better during transport, and the bags have a shoulder strap so you can carry everything easier.

Right now, anyone interested in checking out the new shopping idea can get a basket or bag at the Tompkins County Planning Department. The office is located at 121 East Court Street in Ithaca. The phone number is (607) 274-5560.

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